



Shape Your Future: Put the Brakes on ‘Weight Creep’

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“But I don’t have a weight problem,” you say. That’s precisely the point and why the Air Force is ensuring you keep it that way by offering tools to help you keep your weight in check.

A half-pound here and a half pound there, and you have the makings of a weight problem. You might scratch your head and wonder where this weight came from and remember being so “in shape” when you were in high school or first entered the service. Well, you didn’t gain it overnight but probably ounce by ounce maybe over a course of years.

“Weight creep,” said Major Maureen Harback, Registered Dietitian and Deputy Health Promotion Operations, Air Force Medical Service Agency, “is the 1-2 pound weight gain that many people experience, including our active duty.” Weight creep contributes significantly to the national, and Air Force, weight problem. “Many people aren’t worried about their weight now, but the pounds add up over the years,” she added.

“For example,” she said, “the average rate of weight gain for males is 1.9 pounds per year. A male could theoretically pack on 36 pounds by the time he retired!” Major Harback added, “That’s exactly what our statistics are showing—AF members are averaging the same rate of weight gain as the civilian population.”

Recent weight trends show that over 64% of American adults are overweight or obese with 15% of kids (6-19 years) being overweight.³ The trend has reached an all-time high. In fact, poor diet and lack of physical activity is only a fraction behind tobacco use as the number one cause of death in the U.S.

“Our active duty hover around 52% of men and 24% of women are overweight or obese,” Major Harback, said. “While we have less people proportionally in the obese category, compared to the civilian population, overweight has become a critical issue effecting health and readiness.”

Excess weight contributes to a number of health problems such as coronary heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and certain types of cancer, to name a few.

The overweight/obesity issue is an enormous one in terms of the extent, growth rate, cost, and impact on health and readiness. Its roots are an extremely complex web of multiple causes and influences.

“Unfortunately, the problem most likely will not disappear anytime soon, because there is no ‘quick fix.’” Major Harback said. “Reducing the weight gain trend requires innovative approaches, strategies and tactics on multiple levels, much like the various types of weapons, equipment and tactics used to defeat an enemy,” she said. “We will have to attack on many fronts to include where we work, live and play. This will require commitment from our communities and leaders.”

Shape Your Future... Your Weigh!™ (SYFYW) is one of many tools in the Air Force arsenal to combat overweight/obesity.

“Because of our limited success in promoting long term weight loss, attacking the problem by preventing weight gain is the best chance we have to reduce the incidence of overweight and obesity in our Air Force population,” said Major Harback.

With this in mind, the Air Force Medical Service developed the *SYFYW* initiative. She said, “The tools *SYFYW* offers reflect its mission to expand the awareness of ‘weight creep,’ provide

multiple strategies to prevent or limit weight gain, empower individuals to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and energize a community approach to preventing weight gain.”

Designed as a web-based tool kit, *SYFYW* offers valuable tools for the Air Force community. For the Air Force health promotion professional, large-scale awareness of weight creep and the environment are the focus of attention and packaged as an electronic tool kit.

For all Air Force members, the *SYFYW* community website was recently launched. This publicly accessible site features practical information about the impact of ‘weight creep’ and overweight and how to prevent it through healthy diet and physical activity.

Major Harback points out, “The site features an ever-growing compilation of self-help tools including self-assessment links, quick tips, articles, handouts and other resources to help people prevent weight gain.”

“We also know that there are times in one’s life when the risk of gaining weight increases,” Major Harback said. Future additions to the *SYFYW* initiative will include materials targeted at high-risk weight gain situations such as deployments, injuries and temporary duty.

She concludes, “It is easier to avoid gaining weight than it is to lose weight after you’ve put on the pounds!” Consider making weight gain prevention a part of your strategy for a healthy lifestyle! Put the brakes on weight creep. For more information, see the *SYFYW* community website at <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/shapeyourfuture>.